

August 1, 2024

Dear Judge Mahelchick,

I was 12 years old when Brian was born. My sister was 17, and it was a time when stigma surrounded young women in her situation. She and Brian's father, John Wilder were married and Brian was born. They faced many struggles including John drinking too much and this led to turmoil in their lives. Their marriage ended in divorce when Brian was very young. Viv and Brian moved into our mother's home. At some point John moved away with a friend of his, leaving Brian. Viv met Alan Oetting and they were married. Alan mentally abused Brian. Taking every opportunity to belittle Brian, intimidate him and continually make Brian feel inadequate and disappointing. In short, Alan was a bully. As his aunt, I witnessed this many times over the years. Brian developed a stutter, which made things even worse for him.

April 22, 1983, his sister Jessie was born. Brian often said, "When Jessie was born, she saved me." Jessie was a very special little girl. She was happy, sweet, feisty and a fun-loving little girl. Brian loved her more than he loved anyone else. Sadly, Jessie was diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy when she was about seven years old. Everyone was devastated. As her disease progressed, Brian helped with Jessie, doing things a brother would normally not have to do. Jessie needed help with everything, from eating, to transferring to and from her chair, and all manners of daily life. He was a good big brother to her and willingly helped however he could. Jessie passed away October 19, 2010. She was 27. She left a big hole in all our hearts.

Viv and Alan divorced, and Brian graduated from high school in 1988. Ed and Jean Gruetzemacher were influential in Brian enlisting in the Army. When he returned from basic, he was able to get a position at the National Guard. Brian held that position until he was not able to pass the PT tests that were mandatory. After that he held several positions with different companies. He would find a position and be doing well with it and then they would lay people off and he was affected by that several times. I believe, this contributed to his lack of self-esteem.

One of the best things that ever happened to him was meeting Angie Hillen. He and Angie have been good friends for several years. They decided that they would be roommates and moved in together in a house that Angie was able to purchase. They shared the home and its responsibilities. Angie had Cameron, her son. Brian became a 'father' to Cameron. Cam called him, "Bryna". The three of them lived together as a family and, I believe they were a blessing to each other. Brian was an important part of their lives. Not just financially helping with expenses, but as a father figure to Cam. I remember Brian speaking so proudly of all of Cam's accomplishments. Cam is a very good athlete, and Brian never missed a game. He was always present. He helped with all the things families do to support their child's interests. He would tell us how well Cam was

doing in school, making friendships, athletic accomplishments, and he took great pleasure in his accomplishments. He would be that fan in the stands cheering loudly for "my boy". He was so proud of Cam and he made sure that Cam knew it. He told me many times that he wanted to make sure Cam knew he was loved, knew he was important, knew he was successful and had worth, unlike how Brian grew up.

As Brian matured and expanded his circle of friends, he became active in the Jaycees. A group of young people who were committed to raising funds to support local causes. He worked on their many committees, including the Cole County Fair committee, their major fundraiser. He worked his way up through the officer positions and eventually became the President. I went to his inaugural event and he was beaming. He was so proud of what he had accomplished and was so happy to be able to help the organization successfully achieve their mission. He found personal value there.

Brian harbored much torment because of his childhood and it was difficult for him to accept how he was abandoned by his father, bullied, and abused by his step dad and was not protected from their actions by his mother. He often turned to alcohol and there were many nights when he would call me to talk about things from his past. These conversations would go on for hours, and he would talk about why he was put behind the man in his mother's life. He struggled to let go of the past and focus on the positives of his life. His great friendship with Angie, the opportunity to be a part of Cam's life and the job he had finally landed that seemed to be his place that he would be able to retire from. I regret not being able to find the right words to give him comfort and find peace with his past and to let go of those times that traumatized him.

When Brian was taken away, our world turned upside down. Brian had become a major source of support for his mom. She had lost her baby girl and her beloved husband Bruce McKay had passed away early in 2020. His mom had turned to alcohol as Bruce's health deteriorated and she became an alcoholic. After Bruce's passing, she became worse. Brian stepped in to try to deal with the many challenges a son faces taking care of his mother. He took many steps in order to make sure she didn't hurt herself and became her right hand. Many times he had to go to her house to make sure she was okay. When she had knee surgery, he took care of her and that included doing basic physical care. Her drinking compounded her physical deterioration, and he was able to convince her to go to treatment for alcohol abuse and try to get sober. She did go and, for a while, she was better. She did start drinking again before Brian was taken, but after, she went back to her old habits. I was able to get her to recognize what she was doing to herself and she has been sober since January 2024.

As Brian's aunt, he has called me regularly since he was arrested and we have spoken about his future. He is remorseful and worries about his Mom and how

this is impacting her. He regrets not being able to be there to help her as she continues to age and have increased physical challenges. He knows that there is a very real possibility that his mom and his aunt could pass away before he would be released. We are all so sad that this is a very real possibility. We are a very small family. My sister and I are the only two siblings. I have my husband, Gary and we have a son, Justin. That is all of us. We understand that Brian faces a minimum mandatory sentence of 15 years, and we appeal to the court to impose no more than the minimum. We hope to be able to enjoy a few years with Brian back among us before we will be gone, and it is too late. We miss him terribly and we know that he has taken responsibility and plans to work hard to take advantage of the programs offered by the prison system to improve himself and re-enter society as a productive person.

My name is Donna Viessman. I am Brian's aunt, and I love and miss him very much. I went to college at Lincoln University and graduated with a dual degree in Journalism and Art. After graduation I worked at a local radio station and five years later became a founding partner of Imagemark Marketing and Advertising. My career there spanned 35 years and we grew into a very successful company focusing on helping local businesses achieve their goals. I retired in November of 2020. If you would require any further information, I am available at 573-694-1946.

Best Regards,

Donna Viessman